

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A distributed electronic tournament system in which a plurality of remotely located players participate in a tournament through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the tournament, the system comprising:

(a) means for uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central controller via an associated input/output device;

(b) means responsive to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the player to participate in a tournament occurring within a fixed time window via an associated input/output device;

(c) means for accessing a database to store in the database player information that is generated as the player participates in the tournament, such information being available for use in a subsequent tournament, which is administered by said controller and in which the player participates; and

(d) means for awarding the player a prize for achieving a pre-established performance level in the tournament.

2. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:

the system further comprises game software; and

part of the game software resides in the central controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

3. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 2 wherein the part of the game software residing in the input/output device performs bandwidth-intensive functions.

1 4. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 input/output device includes secured memory storing tournament-related data.

1 5. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 4 wherein the
2 tournament-related data include signals representing time.

1 6. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the entry
2 fee for the tournament is based on the amount of time the player participates in the
3 tournament.

1 7. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level requires dexterity.

1 8. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves answering questions with
3 deterministic answers.

1 9. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves prediction.

1 10. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 the attainment of
2 the pre-established performance level involves solving puzzles.

1 11. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves strategy.

1 12. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves chance.

1 13. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the pre-
2 established performance level includes the amount of time required to achieve that
3 level.

1 14. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein solutions
2 to problems posed in tournaments are not deterministic and evaluating them requires
3 judgment.

1 15. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 tournament time window has a fixed end time.

1 16. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 15 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level requires dexterity.

1 17. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 15 further
2 comprising means for notifying players who are participating in the tournament that the
3 tournament is about to end.

1 18. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 tournament time window has a fixed start time.

1 19. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 18 wherein the
2 attainment of the pre-established performance level involves answering questions with
3 deterministic answers.

1 20. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 18 further
2 comprising means for notifying players who have registered for the tournament that the
3 tournament is about to start.

21. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the prize for the tournament depends on the number of players participating in the tournament.

22. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the number of players in the tournament is restricted to be below a preset value.

23. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein a pre-determined number of positions for players are reserved for a selected group of players until the starting time of the tournament is a preset time away, at which time the reserved positions will be made available to all players, including those not within the selected group.

24. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the means responsive to payment of an entry fee provides the option for the player to pay before the player participates in the tournament.

25. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 24 wherein the means responsive to payment of an entry fee provides the option for the player to enter a password, which is linked to the player's credit card number to automatically charge the entry fee to the credit card account.

26. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the means responsive to payment of an entry fee provides a plurality of payment options.

27. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 26 wherein the means responsive to payment of an entry fee:

- stores the payment option selected by the player in the tournament; and
- automatically activates that option after the player has been identified in a subsequent tournament.

1 28. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein there are
2 a plurality of games in the tournament and the games are different.

1 29. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 28 wherein each
2 game in the tournament is governed by a set of parameters, whose values change as a
3 function of time.

1 30. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes at least one game; and
3 that game is based on a contemporaneous live event.

1 31. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes a plurality of games; and
3 each player participates in a plurality of games.

1 32. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 there are a plurality of games in the tournament;
3 a number of games have different game formats;
4 different players are involved in games in different game formats;
5 the outcomes of the games are statistically normalized to facilitate comparison
6 among different game formats; and
7 the players in games in different game formats compete against each other to
8 win common prizes.

1 33. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 8 wherein the
2 system keeps track of the amount of time the player participates in the tournament.

1 34. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 player has to complete a qualifying event before the player can participate in the
3 tournament.

1 35. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 34 wherein the
2 system determines if a player is eligible to participate in a subsequent tournament based
3 on the results of the player's participation in the present tournament.

1 36. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the
2 difficulty level of the tournament is adjusted as the tournament is played.

1 37. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein:
2 the tournament includes games; and
3 the games in the tournament are based on a recently concluded event.

1 38. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein each
2 input/output device comprises a screen having multiple windows thereon, with one
3 window displaying the tournament in which the associated player is currently
4 participating.

1 39. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 38 further
2 comprising means for the player to enter preferences which determine the size of the
3 window displaying the tournament.

1 40. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes payment information.

1 41. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes the player's performance information.

1 42. A distributed electronic tournament system as recited in claim 1 wherein the player
2 information includes the player's preferences.

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1 43. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system in which a plurality of
2 remotely located players participate in a tournament having multiple game sessions
3 through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the
4 tournament, the system comprising:

5 (a) means for uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central
6 controller via an associated input/output device;

7 (b) means responsive to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the
8 player to participate in a particular game session occurring within a fixed time window
9 via an associated input/output device;

10 (c) means for determining whether the player has been qualified to advance to a
11 subsequent game session, in which at least one player is eliminated from the previous
12 game session;

13 (d) means for awarding the player a prize for being qualified to advance to a
14 subsequent game session; and

15 (e) means for permitting each player qualified to a subsequent game session to
16 participate in that game session.

1 44. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein a database associated with the central controller manages the game sessions,
3 said database containing information on individual players.

1 45. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein:

3 the system further comprises game software; and
4 for each game session, part of the game software resides in the central
5 controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

1 46. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein each input/output device includes secured memory storing game-session-
3 related data.

1 55. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 54
2 wherein the means for a player to pay an entry fee:

3 stores the payment option selected by a player in a previous game session; and
4 automatically activates that option after the player has been identified.

1 56. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein:

3 a game session includes at least one game; and
4 the game sessions are based on a contemporaneous live event.

1 57. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein:

3 there are a plurality of games in a game session;
4 a number of games have different game formats;
5 different players are involved in games having different game formats;
6 the outcomes of the games are statistically normalized to facilitate comparison
7 among different game formats; and
8 the players in games in different game formats compete against each other to
9 win common prizes.

1 58. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43
2 wherein each player has to complete a qualifying event before the player can participate
3 in a game session.

1 59. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 58
2 wherein the system determines if a player is eligible to participate in a game session
3 based on the results of the player's past participation.

60. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein the difficulty level of a game session is adjusted as the game session is played.

61. A distributed electronic elimination tournament system as recited in claim 43 wherein:
a game session includes games; and
the games in the game session are based on a recently concluded event.

62. A method of using a distributed electronic tournament system in which a plurality of remotely located players participate in a tournament through input/output devices connected to a central controller which manages the tournament, the method comprising the steps of:
(a) uniquely identifying a player communicating with the central controller via an associated input/output device;
(b) responding to payment of an entry fee by the player for allowing the player to participate in a tournament occurring within a fixed time window via an associated input/output device;
(c) accessing a database to store in the database player information that is generated as the player participates in the tournament, such information being available for use in a subsequent tournament, which is administered by said controller and in which the player participates; and
(d) awarding the player a prize for achieving a pre-established performance level in the tournament.

63. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:
the system further comprises game software; and
part of the game software resides in the central controller and part of the game software resides in the input/output devices.

1 64. A method as recited in claim 63 wherein the part of the game software residing in
2 the input/output device performs bandwidth-intensive functions.

1 65. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein each input/output device includes secured
2 memory storing tournament-related data.

1 66. A method as recited in claim 65 wherein the tournament-related data include
2 signals representing time.

1 67. A method as recited in claim 65 wherein the tournament-related data include
2 payment information.

1 68. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the entry fee for the tournament is based
2 on the amount of time the player participates in the tournament.

1 69. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level requires dexterity.

1 70. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves answering questions with deterministic answers.

1 71. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves prediction.

1 72. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves solving puzzles.

1 73. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the attainment of the pre-established
2 performance level involves strategy.

1 84. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the number of players in the tournament
2 is restricted to be below a preset value.

1 85. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein a pre-determined number of positions for
2 players are reserved for a selected group of players until the starting time of the
3 tournament is a preset time away, at which time the reserved positions will be made
4 available to all players, including those not within the selected group.

1 86. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides the option for the player to pay before the player participates in the
3 tournament.

1 87. A method as recited in claim 86 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides the option for the player to enter a password, which is linked to the player's
3 credit card number to automatically charge the entry fee to the credit card account.

1 88. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 provides a plurality of payment options.

1 89. A method as recited in claim 88 wherein the step of responding to payment
2 includes the steps of:
3 storing the payment option selected by the player in the tournament; and
4 automatically activating that option after the player has been identified in a
5 subsequent tournament.

1 90. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein there are a plurality of games in the
2 tournament and the games are different.

1 91. A method as recited in claim 90 wherein each game in the tournament is governed
2 by a set of parameters, whose values change as a function of time.

1 99. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein:

2 the tournament includes games; and

3 the games in the tournament are based on a recently concluded event.

1 100. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein each input/output device comprises a

2 screen having multiple windows thereon, with one window displaying the tournament

3 in which the associated player is currently participating.

1 101. A method as recited in claim 100 further comprising the step of entering by the

2 player preferences which determine the size of the window displaying the tournament.

1 102. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes payment

2 information.

1 103. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes the

2 player's performance information.

1 104. A method as recited in claim 62 wherein the player information includes the

2 player's preference.

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